

**Notes From Brush Hill**  
**July 1, 2013**  
**By Charles Raskob Robinson**

**“Ya gots to work with what you gots to work with.”**

**The Key to ASMA’s Most Successful Decade Ever: 2003 - 2013**

Stevie Wonder’s famous quote is key to understanding the unprecedented success ASMA has had this past decade for, English aside, this is the philosophy the Society, in fact, adopted following a decade where things went from bad to worse, culminating in the exodus of a number of Fellows who had been stalwart leaders in earlier years. As we celebrate the thirty-fifth anniversary of our Society this year, it is worthwhile to reflect for a few minutes on what the organization has done during these past ten years that has given its name such luster in the public eye, provided challenging opportunities for its members both nationally and regionally, and fundamentally sharpened our understanding of the Society’s mission to advance appreciation of marine art.

On our twenty-fifth anniversary in 2003 I documented in this column the 1978 founding and the unfolding history of the Society. That prose was supported by a massive spreadsheet that presented the officers, board and committee members, dates and locations of exhibitions and Annual General Meetings, awardees, etc. on a year-by-year basis. Because of its size, it has not been published but is available digitally to any member and is maintained in the Society’s files.

This same spreadsheet is now updated to 2013 and this column will look at these last ten years through different lenses. To keep this concise, no names will be mentioned – they all can be found on the spreadsheet and in articles in our quarterly publication – but it should be noted that the Society has been fortunate to have Presidents, Managing Fellows, Fellows and Board Members who brought different but very applicable skills and experiences to help the Society navigate well through this decade and an Editor to record the story. The exception to the no-names

approach is Peter Maytham who stepped in to assume Nancy Stiles' responsibilities as Managing Director when she died five years ago, and did this not only gratis but personally absorbed related operating expenses. If one had to choose who best typifies what has made this decade so successful it would be the selfless, caring and very professional Peter Maytham. He has set an example followed by many in demonstrating how "ya gots to work with what ya gots to work with."

The lenses. Being artists and faced with which lens to use first, let us consider the financial, management and membership lenses later on. Let's turn first to the Society's *raison d'être*: Art. And here we have been very successful. During the past decade we have produced and displayed more art than ever before in our National Exhibitions, our Regional Exhibitions and on our Web Site.

## **1. Exhibitions:**

### **A Record Number of National Venues**

By way of background, the Society got its early sea legs with exhibitions at maritime museums. These were recognized as very important in our early success but in the 'Nineties a conviction developed that we were "preaching to the choir" and that we should be trying to reach the broader public – the unconverted - by exhibiting at fine art museums. This first occurred in a double-barrel National in 1997 – 98, the 11<sup>th</sup> National at the Frye Museum in Seattle and the Cummer Museum in Jacksonville, FL and was followed up with another in 2001, the 12<sup>th</sup> National at the Cape Museum of Fine Art in Dennis, MA and the Riverfront Arts Center in Wilmington, DE. This new policy of exhibiting at fine art museums continued into the decade covered in this update when the Vero Beach Museum of Art in Vero Beach, FL hosted the 13<sup>th</sup> National in 2004.

Learning to "work with what ya gots," the Society's Exhibition Committee built on this experience and developed a formula for mounting the next National, the 14<sup>th</sup>. (That show was also known formally as the Thirtieth Anniversary Exhibition since it was launched on

that anniversary in 2008.) Previously, the Society had borne the financial burden of producing the exhibition catalog. These visual memorials of our history were always important and date back to our beginning. The early black and white exhibition catalogs gradually gave way to color but it was pre-digital color printing and very expensive. In 2001 the Riverfront Arts Center in Wilmington, DE gave the Society an enormous financial shot in the arm when it underwrote the \$40,000 cost of the **12<sup>th</sup> National Exhibition Catalog**, many of which had beautiful hardback covers. But that was an exceptional circumstance, not likely to be repeated. In keeping with usual practices, the Society and a number of its members joined other generous donors to fund the **13<sup>th</sup> National Exhibition Catalog**.

The Exhibition Committee sought a financially more reliable way to fund both the cost of the exhibition catalogs and related promotional material (posters, rack cards, banners, etc.) as well as the expense of shipping an exhibition from one host venue to the next. Membership dues have always been the Society's principal revenue and that has never been much.<sup>1</sup> "Ya gots to work with what ya gots" and, not having much of a wallet, it meant having to use our wits. So the Committee developed a way to off-load the financial burden of these exhibitions onto the hosting museums while at the same time minimizing the weight of that burden on any one host venue. As importantly, the Committee sought to maximize for the Society as well as its venue hosts the return on all of the considerable time, effort and expense that goes into producing a National: Creating the art, jurying it, finding host venues, and then mounting and promoting the exhibition.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2002 when the Society sought a new attorney to replace John H. Reilly, Jr., who had been with us from the beginning but who had retired, we approached Dave Smalley, an avid sailor and partner at the international Wall Street law firm of Debevoise and Plimpton. He asked to see the Society's papers (Charter, By-laws, etc.) and its financials. After reviewing them he had only one question: "Where is the '(000 omitted)' usually found at the top of the financials? Clearly, you don't operate that national organization with all of your exhibitions and quarterly publication for with only \$28,000 in revenues!" He nonetheless came aboard and, fortunately, on a *pro bono* basis.

The formula that resulted was simple and equitable for all involved: The cost of the Exhibition Catalog was divided equally among each of the host venues and the Society such that if there were five host venues, the cost would be shared equally among the six organizations. Each would receive an equal number of catalogs which they could use as they wish, it being clearly understood that revenues from catalog sales went to the selling organization. Since the Society would give a catalog to each member participating in the exhibition and sell the rest, it was paying for its fair share of the cost. The \$40,000 mentioned above is a lot more manageable when divided by six. The introduction of digital printing made the arrangement even sweeter for it significantly reduced the base cost of the catalogs.

But maximizing the return on an exhibition by increasing the number of host venues generates another financial burden, namely, the cost of inter-venue transportation and insurance. Here the same simple, equitable approach was developed and is used. The Society bids the job among established and reputable art transportation companies and the host venues share that expense equally regardless of their geographic location. The Society does not share in this cost since its artists pay to ship their art to the first host venue and back from the last. All in, the cost per venue is minimized and, since the Society does not charge “rent” for these exhibitions, it becomes an attractive financial proposition for the hosts especially since they get a professionally produced, top quality exhibition and catalog, PR and advertising support from the Society and they can keep all revenues they generate from admissions and catalog and poster sales.

Running parallel to standardizing the financial arrangements, the Exhibition Committee developed a basic contract. The fact that it was the same for each venue not only simplifies the paper work but also often helps get venues to sign for they feel they are not alone. This basic contract continues to evolve as our experience grows.

As the result of this approach, the Exhibition Committee was able to mount the most extensive traveling National ever. It ran from May 2008

to September 2009 and five venues hosted it: The Center on the Riverfront in Wilmington, DE; the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels, MD; the Noyes Museum of Art in Oceanville, NJ; the Spartanburg Art Museum in Spartanburg, SC; and the New Bedford Art Museum, New Bedford, MA. Working “with what ya gots,” we greatly increased the return on our investment of time, money and talent and reached a far larger public.

The same was done with the Fifteenth National, only in spades. That Exhibition opened in 2011 and will close this summer. When done it will have traveled over 6,000 miles and been hosted by eight museums found on the Atlantic coast, along the Gulf Coast, deep in the heart of Texas, and the Pacific Coast and will end up in the north central state of Minnesota. It is a strong show and, in spite of Fellows on its jury spending a couple of unplanned extra days to limit it to the size contracted with the host museums, they were unsuccessful for it boasts more than 120 works of painting, sculpture and scrimshaw. Fortunately, the museums were able to accommodate the extra works.

Impressively, the Society mounted three Nationals during this past decade that were hosted by *fourteen* public venues. To put this in perspective, in the entire history of the Society prior to this decade, the total number of public and private venues that hosted our Nationals totaled *sixteen*.

### **A Record Number of Regional Exhibitions**

The Society’s Nationals date back to the very beginning and back then occurred with some frequency. In fact they were mounted annually until 1983. During the decade 1984 – 1993 there were four and from 1994 – 2003 there were two. The focus was on the National Exhibitions and only in recent years did Regional Exhibitions begin to appear in number.

But twenty years ago a band of hard working ASMA members out in the Northwest got the Coos Art Museum of Coos Bay, OR to host a

maritime exhibition. It was a success and was repeated in large part because of their determination to make it an annual event. This year the Coos Art Museum is planning a gala 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its Annual Maritime Art Exhibition. In the course of this past decade the ASMA bond with this exhibition was further tightened when the Society and Museum formally agreed to co-sponsor the Annual, making it the Society's only official annual Regional Exhibition with a museum. Interestingly, and this is an exception to our practice, it is an open invitational but, in keeping with our practice, is juried.

Another, less formal, relationship has grown up at the other end of the Pacific coast in Oxnard, CA where the Ventura County Maritime Museum also began an annual marine exhibition. Every other year it invites ASMA members in the West to submit works. The recorded history these shows is not as clear as that of the Coos Art Museum but it came to an end in after the 2009 ASMA invitational. The museum moved into a new, but unfinished, larger facility just as the impact of the Great Recession struck, slowing construction and the transition. But they hope to resume their ASMA invitationals and, when they do, it will be under their new name, the Channel Islands Maritime Museum, reflecting the much broader area of Southern California they now serve.

While one might be tempted to say that the growth of Regionals first in the West probably reflects the distance and isolation from the East, it is interesting to note that a very significant percentage of the Society's original membership came from the West. That was because in the 'Seventies Westerners had built their own network of ship preservationists and artists and came to the Society when their leaders joined hands with their counterparts in the East and created the Society in 1978. The fact that they have been having Regionals for so long might simply suggest they are more energetic and better organized.

But another reason for growing interest in Regionals is the good-news/bad-news that the artistic standards of the Nationals have steadily

risen over the years and it has become more and more difficult to jury into them. This is not surprising for there has been, in fact, a significant growth in the numbers of very competent marine artists over the last decade. As ASMA Regional Committees became more active and sought to give their members more exhibition exposure, the increasing numbers of Regionals was a natural consequence. While the standards might be more demanding for the Nationals, the Fellowship – the body in the Society charged with maintaining artistic standards of the Society, requires the Regionals have a high bar and be juried by Signature Members approved by them and usually at least one Fellow. Much like the Nationals, the Regionals have grown in quality and substance and, like the Nationals, the Regional Exhibition Committee (part of the Exhibition Committee) has adopted a standard formula for sharing costs and a standard contract. Encouragingly, interest in Regionals has been growing both among our members and the museums and art associations that can host them.

In addition to the ongoing Region 5 (ASMA West) exhibitions discussed above, Region 2 (ASMA East) in the past arranged for exhibitions at the Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, Long Island, NY but its first show in the past decade was *Sea Fever* in 2006 at the Art League of Long Island in Dix, NY in conjunction with another Long Island museum, the Cold Spring Harbor Whaling Museum, that lent works to the exhibition.

The following year, in 2007, the Society mounted its first Regional in the Great Lakes, the Region 4 (now part of ASMA North) show at the Krasl Art Museum in Saint Joseph, MI. Region 5 (ASMA West) was busy with the Annual at Coos Art Museum but also with an exhibition at the Maritime Museum of San Diego.

While the Coos Art Museum hosted its Annual in 2008, back East new performance standards were set when Region 1 (ASMA North) opened the *New England Exhibition* at the Cultural Center of Cape Cod in South Yarmouth, MA and then, for the first time for a Regional, took it

on the road. It went first to the Herreshoff Marine Museum and America's Cup Hall of Fame in Bristol, RI and then on to the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath, ME. In the next year, 2009, the Coos Art Museum mounted its Annual and the Ventura County Maritime Museum hosted its every-other-year ASMA invitational.

2010 was very active for Regionals. In addition to the Coos Annual, there were two traveling shows, one mounted by Region 1 (ASMA North) and the other by Region 2 (ASMA East). The former opened at Wisconsin Maritime Museum in Manitowoc, WI and moved to the Minnesota Maritime Museum in Winona, MN while the latter was a three-venue show. It opened at the Briggs Museum in Dover, DE, traveled to the Washington County Museum of Fine Art in Hagerstown, MD before heading north to the Buffalo Naval Park Museum in Buffalo, NY.

While the Coos Annual continued in 2011 and 2012, there was no other activity. However, a good deal of spadework by ASMA South during those years paid off. As this goes to press, the Quinlan Visual Arts Center in Gainesville, GA will open what may be the largest Regional ever – eighty works. Moreover it is being well publicized and promoted, which, combined with the status of the Museum, will facilitate future opportunities in that part of the country for both Regionals and Nationals.

At the close of the decade a new type of exhibition for the Society was created, one built around a "theme." Running parallel to another first for the Society, a video documentary about the War of 1812 (more below), an ambitious five-venue theme exhibition titled *1812 - Star Spangled Nation* opens in September of this year at the Buffalo History Museum, in Buffalo, NY. Early next year it travels to the Detroit Public Library in Detroit, MI, the scene of one of the most impressive British victories early in the war – the surrender of an entire American army without a fight. The show then moves back East to the Connecticut River Museum in Essex, CT in time to commemorate the famous "Burning of the Fleet" Bicentennial on April 7, 2014 – thought to be the largest single American

economic disaster of the 1812 War. Next it opens at Lake Champlain Maritime Museum at Vergennes, VT to commemorate what many 1812 historians believe is the most significant American victory of the War, the Battle of Lake Champlain on September 11, 1814. The Exhibition, yet to be juried, will feature an estimated forty works of art and is scheduled to conclude in Baltimore, MD, the scene of the September 12 – 14, 1814 Battle of Baltimore and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry that was memorialized by the words of the American National Anthem. The ASMA 2014 Annual General Meeting to held in Baltimore that fall will coincide with the Exhibition.

Working “with what ya gots” and more aggressively using the Regional Committees, the Society posted its best performance ever with *twenty-three* Regional exhibition venues over the last ten years (and maybe even more since the Ventura County records are not clear). Combine these with those of the National over the same period and, indeed, the Society has had the best exhibition performance ever: *Thirty-seven* venues have featured our art and over *forty-two* if you count the *1812 Star Spangled Nation* Exhibition. Mathematically on average, that is equivalent to *an ASMA exhibition every ninety days for ten years*.

## **2. The Bigger World of Cyberspace**

### **The ASMA Web Site**

While the Society was racking up new performance records in the field of traditional brick and mortar exhibitions, it worked steadily throughout the decade to improve and enhance what, in theory, is its most powerful exhibition tool, its web site. It features the Society’s principal educational activities – the National and Regional Exhibitions and its quarterly publication, the *ASMA News and Journal* as well as links to members and galleries to view their work. The site now has the ability to facilitate financial transactions such as dues payments and catalog purchases. It is such an effective and useful tool, some Regional Committees have set up their own, like ASMA West.

### **An Internet Documentary**

Another innovation undertaken during this past decade has been the *Naval War of 1812 Illustrated*. One could think of this as a variation on a theme exhibition and a web site; it is neither but a bit of both. The concept came about back in 2010 when the Exhibition Committee set out to mount a traveling show featuring the work from a half dozen museums and the art of ASMA members for the 1812 Bicentennial. Needless to say, it proved far too difficult to arrange but in the process the notion of an ASMA theme exhibition on our web site surfaced.

While we stumbled about trying to figure out how to best to this, we became emerged in the small world of 1812 specialists. This led to getting two members of the faculty of the History Department of Temple University in Philadelphia (the 27<sup>th</sup> largest university in the U.S.) whose particular interest was the naval War of 1812 to write the narration for what would become a documentary. While this launched our project, much of what they did had to be redone as we gradually shaped the documentary along lines that suited the Society's needs and resources. In the course of all of this, the U.S. Navy learned about the "project" and asked if they might host the final product on their dedicated 1812 Bicentennial web site, [www.ourflagwasstillthere.org](http://www.ourflagwasstillthere.org). And thus began the collaboration with the Navy which grew subsequently to include the Marine Corps and Coast Guard. While ASMA has some historical painters, we needed many more images to illustrate the narration so that led to approaching museums and historical societies to ask for permission to use images of works in their permanent collections.

In the end, over sixty museums, historical societies and institutions in France, the United Kingdom, Canada and the U.S. participated. The works of over 160 artists from all over the world and from the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries, including fifty living and deceased ASMA members, were involved in the documentary. The four-hour documentary is presented in seven segments on an ASMA web site (that has a slave presence on the site the Navy set up) [www.naval-war-of-1812-illustrated.org](http://www.naval-war-of-1812-illustrated.org). This educational video is free to all to use as they wish. At present it is being promoted among museums, schools, libraries, yacht

clubs, etc. and is particularly relevant as the bicentennials of the major events of that war are celebrated over the next two years. “Ya works with what ya gots” was certainly the case here. It is estimated the video would have cost well over a half million dollars if it were done commercially but it has cost the Society only a few thousand dollars, and much of this was contributed by members. Living by our wits not our wallet. It is also noteworthy that none of the support and collaboration with the American Maritime services, the museums, historical societies and other institutions that we enjoyed in making the documentary would have been possible without our educational 501.C.3 status and the good name and reputation of the Society.

### **3. The ASMA News and Journal** **A Transformative Decade**

Exhibitions and web sites are clearly important to the education mission of the Society but our magazine is a vital quarterly reminder that the Society is alive and well. *ASMA News* underwent a dramatic transformation during this past decade. Ten years ago it was a one-color (blue), black and white, 24 – 32 page publication printed on non-glossy paper and featuring a line drawing on its cover. The Editor, ever eager to improve his work, seized on the opportunity our Thirtieth Anniversary provided and not only introduced our first color cover but changed the name to reflect the maturation of the magazine. No longer the *ASMA News*, it became the *ASMA News and Journal* with *Journal* articles presented separately within the magazine. This occurred with the April 2008 issue featuring our first color cover, a dramatic painting by Charles Lundgren, our founder.

“Ya gots to work with what ya gots” was demonstrated again in this transformation. One of the Fellows refused to take payment for a painting of his that my wife and I wanted for a collection of Fellows work we were building. But he was willing to donate the funds to the Society if used for a special purpose. He funded the first color cover and used the remaining funds to match other contributions to pay for subsequent covers. It

worked and gradually more color pages were added. A year and half after the first color cover appeared, the entire magazine was printed in color.

The Editor continues to try different approaches to engage the reader. Some aspects have become hallmarks and are expected in every issue: The letter from the President and an article from the Editor; news on Regional Committee activities; basic operational news about upcoming exhibitions; articles about members' studios with photographs; articles written by the Fellows "In the Fellows Corner," etc. There have also been Regular Contributing Writers and these include the late Pete Eagleton who scripted "Harbor Lights" for eleven years before his death in 2005, the on-going "Christine's Log" which began when "Harbor Lights" ended, and "Notes from Brush Hill," now in its 18<sup>th</sup> year.

### **The Broadening Reach of the Publication**

In the course of the last decade, the reach of the quarterly, at least in theory, has greatly expanded in a number of ways. Already noted is the fact that past issues are now posted for all to read on the Society's web site. But there have been other important benchmarks in expanding the reach of our quarterly. Attracted to the systematic documentation and in-depth analysis about the work and lives of the ASMA members as especially found in the "Notes from Brush Hill" column, the Smithsonian Institution began to collect the magazines in 2005 as part of their broader effort to record what they can about contemporary American artists. The Library of Congress followed suit for the same reasons and in March 2007 the Section Head for North American Acquisitions formally received a complete set of the publication and Exhibition Catalogs going back to the beginning of the Society. The following year the Thomas J. Watson Research Library of the Metropolitan Museum of Art also began to collect our quarterly.

Another form of publicity leverage that has grown out of our magazine began in 2008 when the Editor of the prestigious *Fine Art Connoisseur* magazine, Peter Trippi, became fascinated with the art he saw in the *14<sup>th</sup> National Exhibition Catalog*. In the spring of that year, he accepted an

invitation to come from New York City to address the Society members gathered at the Annual General Meeting and opening of the 14<sup>th</sup> National in Wilmington, DE in the spring of that year. As a result, his magazine ran an article about the 14<sup>th</sup> National along with a generous spread of works in the Exhibition. That began a working relationship where at least once a year Trippi has run an article based on one that has appeared in the “Notes from Brush Hill” column. The next one will appear in the July/August issue of *Fine Art Connoisseur*.

#### **4. Management Performance and Artistic Standards**

##### **Resolution of Earlier Difficulties**

Up until the 'Nineties, the Fellows had run the Society thru the management structure that existed from the beginning, namely thru the Board which operated under the Society's Charter and By-laws. There was no perceived difference between “management” and the “Fellows” for, in effect, they were one and the same: The Fellows had a majority on the Board and, at the same time, were responsible for maintaining the artistic standards of the Society. The former (the Board) dealt with the day to day running of the Society while the latter (the Fellows) handled responsibility for the level of excellence in artistic matters but this functional dichotomy was not all that clearly perceived until the 'Nineties when the Fellows decided it would be good to have more non-Fellows on the Board so the Fellows could shed some of the day-to-day management responsibilities.

But this transition did not go smoothly in large part because the functional dichotomy was not yet understood from a practical point of view. The last couple of years of the last century and the first couple of this one saw some instances of distressing divergence from the normal civility and mutual respect traditionally found in the Society. It all culminated with the departure of five Fellows, two of whom had been Presidents. (Two of these five returned when they saw measures had been taken to address the underlying problems.)

##### **Back to the Drawing Board**

So, beginning in the second half of 2001 the remaining Fellows and Board members clarified their respective responsibilities and the procedures by which they were to be executed and the membership cast these in stone by voting to amend the By-laws to reflect these changes. For the Fellows this meant recognizing that they were not just a couple dozen individuals charged with certain responsibilities but a functioning group, the Fellowship, that had to see these responsibilities were discharged efficiently and effectively and in conjunction with the different responsibilities the Board had.

To do this, a small administrative/management group was created and charged with insuring the Fellowship responsibilities were executed and with presenting in an organized and orderly fashion matters to the Fellowship be decided by the majority of its members. This group, the Fellowship Management Committee (FMC), insures two additional goals: That no clique of Fellows develops over time but rather decisions are taken in a democratic manner and, since all new Fellows (and most of the long standing ones) are expected to serve on the FMC, there would develop over time a solid practical understanding about how the Society works and what its mission is. Learning thru work and time served.

The FMC consists of three members, each serving for a staggered term of three years, one of which is at the helm as Managing Fellow. Thus it is constantly changing as new Fellows join the FMC and those completing their three-year commitment, depart. This arrangement has worked very well and only had one failure. But there the other members of the FMC covered for him until new Fellows automatically filled his slot. The experience further sharpened and clarified what is expected of a Fellow and this is now made clear to a candidate for Fellowship before she or he can be elected.

In addition to the exposure to the workings of the Fellowship that the FMC process provides over time to all Fellows, technology has permitted their greater – and now mandatory – participation in the jury process, the most important aspect of maintaining the artistic standards of

the Society. Thanks to the Internet, now all Fellows regardless where they are in the world, participate. Over the decade the Fellowship has clarified the percentages (majority or super-majority) required for different jury matters (acceptance into an exhibition, election as a Signature Member, and election as a Fellow).

The Board also set about to improve its performance. Taking advantage of technological advances, they, like the Fellowship, began to communicate more and hold more meetings “virtually” on the Internet. To increase efficiency, the Board decided to reduce the number of its members from sixteen or more to twelve or less; this would allow for a smaller cadre of working Board members and would lessen quorum requirement difficulties since fewer members were required to constitute a quorum. To insure smoother governance, the Board established terms and staggered them and used a Nominating Committee to recommend new candidates. The Board considers these and then makes its recommendation to the Membership who elects Board members. The Board also strengthened the composition and role of the Regional Committees. As seen in the remarkable success of Regional Exhibitions, this has been paying off.

In the past decade the Board and Fellowship have demonstrated they can and have met management and artistic standards, the fundamentally important underpinning of all future hopes and aspirations for the Society. Not everything tried has succeeded – sometimes because the idea was ill conceived in terms of its practicality (such as having a series of hour-long videos of Signature Members in their studios) or other times because there was no will or funds to execute it (outreach programs to art schools and yacht clubs). Yet other programs were successfully launched – such as the Workshops taught by the Fellows at leading art schools (Lyme Academy College of Fine Art in Lyme, CT and the Maine College of Art in Portland, ME) and ran for a couple of years but were brought down by the Great Recession. But all of these ideas are respectfully considered and some are approved. When they fail, lessons are learned and life goes on.

## **5. Financial Performance**

### **A Troubled Beginning**

The past decade began with a very shaky and deteriorating financial situation that was inherited from the decade before. The fact that there has been a remarkable turnaround and the Society now enjoys a financial solvency is due in very large part to the one person named in this historical update, namely Peter Maytham. In the 'Nineties the Board opted to pay the Business Manager/Managing Director, Nancy Stiles, a salary instead of continuing the hourly wage she had been on. Without any judgment about the wisdom of this nor comment on whether this was justified (in truth, you probably could not pay another individual any amount to step into her shoes at that time), the simple fact was that the Society could not afford the steadily increasing percentage of total revenues that went to pay for her, and in time, to pay the rent for office space her family had for many years provided for free. In the Society's records, all of this has been documented but it was made tragically worse by the fact that as the treasury dwindled, she began to lose and eventually lost her fight with cancer in 2008. She was an example of grace and determination for all and had devotedly served the Society for twenty years. In recognition of this, at the AGM in the spring of the year she died, the Fellowship gave her a framed print signed by all of the Fellows.

During the first years of the past decade, efforts were undertaken to address the financial situation and in 2004 a thorough analysis of the Society's goals, mission, strengths and weaknesses was coupled with a very detailed financial projection analysis showing where the Society was headed financially and presenting two projected solutions. (This "2004 Strategic Study" is found in the Society's records and anyone looking to do such financial projections in the future would be well advised to consider all of the program work already done there since any of the underlying assumptions can be easily changed without having to rebuild the program.) The first solution was to do better with existing resources and the second was a much more ambitious program to build a professional staff that would raise money to support itself while

executing a more ambitious program based on the Society's goals and mission. By way of scale, the former assumed a revenue stream closer to what ours had been, roughly \$25,000 per year while the latter was closer to ten times that, \$250,000, most of which would have to come from grants. The Board adopted the former but the projected depletion of the Society's till (and hence payment to Nancy) led the President to cancel program; the situation was only saved by circumstance, namely Nancy's death. Before leaving this matter, it should be noted that a couple of members worked valiantly to raise corporate funding for a prolonged period of time but to no avail. Artists sometimes have misconceptions about the real financial world.

At that point Peter Maytham, who had been brought in to serve as Treasurer in 2002 by his former shipmate, President Richard C. Moore, offered to serve as interim Managing Director until a new one could be found. That was in 2009 and Peter continues to serve not only gratis but continues to absorb many of the normal operating expenses – such as phone and Internet. While this greatly relieved the cash bind the Society was in, an equally significant contribution was his tackling – with the assistance of a number of ASMA members – the task of getting on top of the data base and information systems and using new software and technology to do much of what had been done laboriously by hand. “Doing what ya gots to do with what ya gots to do it with,” the Society's database was transformed, updated and has remained current thanks to ASMA Signature Member Val Sandell who began to work for the Society on an hourly basis in 2010. Another important demonstration of “working with what ya gots” was the decision to replace the very labor intensive work of preparing for jury sessions with new Internet-based services where the process is not only vastly streamlined both for the submitting artist but also for Fellows to jury anywhere in the world. Moreover, the costs associated with the process are clearly identified and are passed on to the potential beneficiary, namely, the submitting artist. Ditto for the ASMA web site – members who are served with links and galleries pay for the service. Another example of using technology to cut costs is the digital printing of the *ASMA News and Journal* and our

National and Regional Exhibition Catalogs and the new cost free, digital communication *ASMA E-News* sent out to members monthly by the President on the Internet.

But we end the decade with a challenge on the financial front. Peter Maytham who is not even an artist and who was truly Shanghaied into ASMA as Treasurer by his friend and shipmate has announced that he will no longer serve as the Managing Director as of the 2013 AGM but is willing to stay on as Treasurer. The ideal solution is to find another Peter Maytham – someone who has the right experience and in retirement wants to “give back” to society, that is, to undertake the post the way Peter has, gratis. As challenging as this might appear to be, Peter has done a lot to improve the chances of getting a replacement for him since he has streamlined the work of the Managing Director and shouldered Val Sandell with much of the burdensome day-to-day work. If the Society is unsuccessful in finding such an individual then the next logical step would be to see if the work associated with the position could be cut further such that the President or Vice President (or both) could assume it. Barring any of these options, the Society will have to go back to the drawing boards just as it did in 2004. But the beauty and genius of what we have created in this decade should not be abandoned lightly. Because we have worked with what we “gots to work with,” unprecedented possibilities have been realized in reaching our goals and objectives in exhibitions, publications, PR, an active Internet presence, financial solvency and viability, etc. - all reflected in the standing and prestige of ASMA currently enjoys as a leading American art organization.

## **6. Membership**

### **A Steady But Churning Size**

Membership, *per se*, is not a stated goal or objective of the Society but obviously without members what we have been doing would be impossible. During the years of financial difficulty, membership growth – and thus revenue growth – was thought to be a way to solve the problem. But this approach carries with it a very real risk that membership growth and members become the mission and replaces our

mission stated in the Charter and By-laws. Moreover it is interesting to look at the dynamics of our membership over the years. Unfortunately no analysis has ever been done other than looking at one facet, turnover. Geographic distribution, length of ASMA membership, the levels of professional involvement, age, type of art, etc. would all be interesting elements to know about our membership. Turnover was examined in the 25-year history and appeared to be notable but perhaps in keeping with organizations like ASMA – a comprehensive comparative analysis would shed light on this. Whether the turnover is from a combination of natural deaths, retirements from the profession, a realization that ASMA is not a trade organization whose purpose is to sell members' art or failure to effectively engage and hold the interests of members is not known.

The 25-year history looked at a simple turnover number and found only ninety-six of the 210 who were members in 1982 were still members in 1999 when there were about 550 members. Said another way, only 17% of the members in 1999 were members seventeen years earlier. A similar analysis done in this decade compares membership in 2007 with that of 2013, and found only 48% of the 2013 membership were members six years earlier. This would appear to be an 8% annual turnover on average (48%/6 years) – probably not a bad rate but we just don't know how it compares. The total number of members has stayed more or less steady throughout the decade – in the 500 – 600 range.

But what should concern the Society and the Board is the ratio of “old” members who have been around and know the Society and its history to the “new” members who do not. Look at the magnitude of the potential problem: Only 48% of the members in 2013 had been in the Society a mere six years before. Yet it is probably a safe bet that most on the Board and most of the Fellows without having thought about it assume that the current membership knows about as much about the Society as they do. The fact is that they don't. If they were better informed, perhaps the turnover would be lower. But perhaps such turnover is natural and should be expected. In any case, the new monthly *ASMA E-News* should help in this regard.

Another effort to lower the turnover was initiated in the last ten years. This involves a number of awards that acknowledge exceptional service by members. The Iron Man Award has been awarded from the beginning. It is a weighty bronze plaque that measures 10” x 12” and bears the ASMA name and logo as well as the recipient’s name and is given on rare occasion by the Board for “Distinguished Service”. Only seven ASMA members have received it in 35 years (an average of once every five years) and, in the very early days, two non-members received it for their work in helping launch the Society. A new award created in the last ten years is the Outstanding Service Award (the OSA). This is awarded by a committee of nine: the current and past two Presidents; the current and past two Managing Fellows; and the past three OSA recipients. A third award, also established in this decade, is the Captain’s Award. This attractively designed ship’s wheel with the ASMA blue logo in the center is made of silver and enamel and is given to each member who has served as President or as Managing Fellow. Unlike the OSA which is a certificate, the Captain’s Award is meant to be worn – to promote the Society in public and build a *esprit de corps* among the leadership of the Society. And finally, the Society began to issue very attractive certificates with the ASMA corporate seal embossed on a gold notary seal to each member who becomes a Signature Member, a Fellow, a Fellow Emeritus or an Honorary Member and are signed by the President.

### **The Grander Vision for Membership**

In 2009 the category “Artist Member” was changed to “Signature Member” to better define the category (Signature Members can add “ASMA” after their signatures) and to make it more in keeping with other professional art associations. At the same time new categories were formally added: Student Member and Honorary Member. The latter are “appointed by the Board in recognition of special services rendered in the cause of Marine Art or the Society.” Thus, along with Member and Fellow, there are now five categories of membership.

After more than a generation of limiting membership to Americans, in 2012 it was opened to anyone, anywhere. In theory this applies to all categories of membership except for Fellow. The latter was excepted on the grounds that a good deal of participation and work is expected and that would be difficult if one were overseas. Time might prove, however, that this reasoning is wanting for the Society has had a Fellow who has lived overseas for years and yet faithfully participated and discharged his responsibilities for decades. And, as we have seen in so many ways during this past decade, the Internet has and will continue to facilitate more membership participation and involvement.

### **Young Marine Artists Search Program (YMAS)**

Looking to the future as well as fulfilling the educational mandate in our charter, in 2008 the Society launched a program to engage and encourage young marine artists, the YMAS. Basically this involves a competition of high school (and sometimes college) students held in advance of an ASMA Regional or National. The works are juried and the top five placeholders are awarded scholarships and in-kind prizes (including signed limited edition prints by the Fellows) and a year's membership to the Society as a Student Member. Most significantly, these top five can exhibit their work in the ASMA exhibit and the awards and prizes are given out at the opening reception – which puts the young artists front and center before the media. It is a very effective way to generate media attention as home town papers and TV stations champion the success of their local town wonders elevated to the national stage of the prestigious ASMA. These competitions began with the Cultural Center of Cape Cod in Massachusetts on a “Cape and Islands” basis but were taken state-wide by the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath ME when the same show traveled there. Subsequently, the Wisconsin Maritime Museum, the Minnesota Museum of Marine Art, the Cornell Museum of Art in Delray Beach, FL among others have hosted the program. A good deal of spade work to figure out how to evolve the program into a national competition and to figure out how to retain the interest and membership of the top placeholders has been done and considerable funding provided by ASMA members in the Northwest. Here, they have

developed an ongoing competition in the same schools so that it is not a “flash in the pan” event. They have worked with the Coos Art Museum – which led the way for our Regionals twenty years ago – to display the winning art. A number of ASMA members have been involved but the challenge for the next decade in this very important and potentially very rewarding endeavor will be to strengthen the organization of the effort, take it national and back it steadily. Our founder, Eric Lundgren, used to remind us that in ASMA “We do it all for the kids.” And these “kids” grow up faster than one thinks – this “kid” included. As an example, one of, if not the first, of our student members – long before there was a Student Member category – Emily Solomon, is now helping orchestrate the traveling *1812 Star Spangled Nation* exhibition in Detroit early in 2014. This is the future – the Society’s future. And at this point, it looks very bright.